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NAVAL ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES - SAN FRANCISCO COMMANDERY



Mission: History

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★★★★★

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1944: With the World's Eyes on Europe, U.S. Fights History's Largest Sea Battle

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Leyte Gulf Actions See Destruction Of Japanese Navy as Fighting Force

In October 1944, the attention of American newspapers and radio was firmly focused on Europe, particularly on the German fortress at Metz, in northeast France. General George S. Patton's seemingly invincible Third Army had bounced off Metz without leaving a dent. Americans had grown to expect great things from Patton, so

they sat by their radios and read the newspapers waiting for Metz to fall.

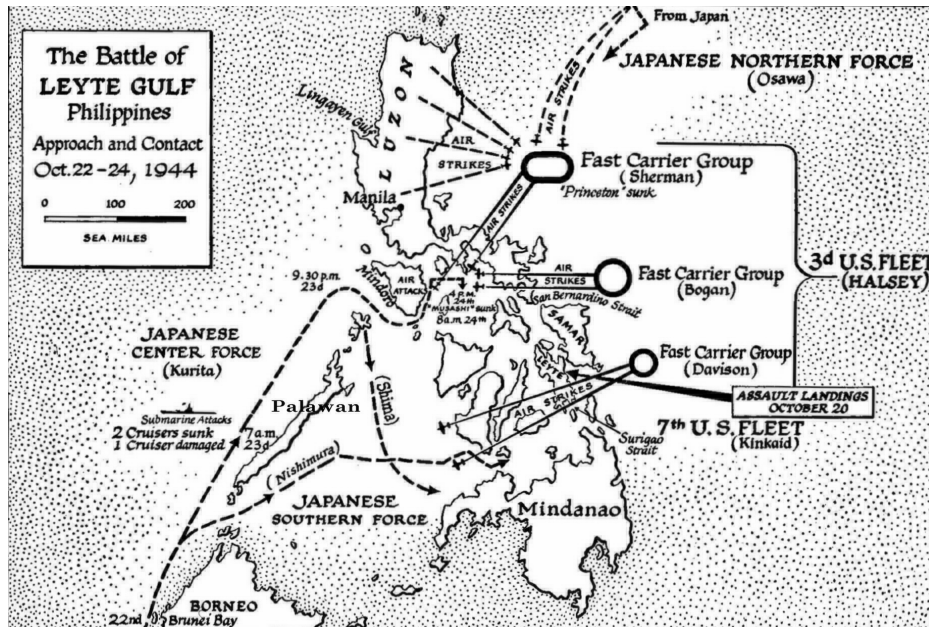
In this vacuum of news from the Pacific, the greatest of all naval battles was fought. The Japanese Navy rolled the dice with everything they had on the line. Two hundred seventy-six warships ranging in size from destroyer to the world's largest battleships took part in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. When it was over, the Jap navy had ceased to exist as a fighting force. There were no replacements in the pipeline and, in fact, there had never been a pipeline to begin with. The Jap well was dry.

Japanese tactical policy had no connection whatsoever to a strategic war plan, but was instead based on the megalomaniac thought that to refuse to yield an inch meant that that inch would not be yielded.

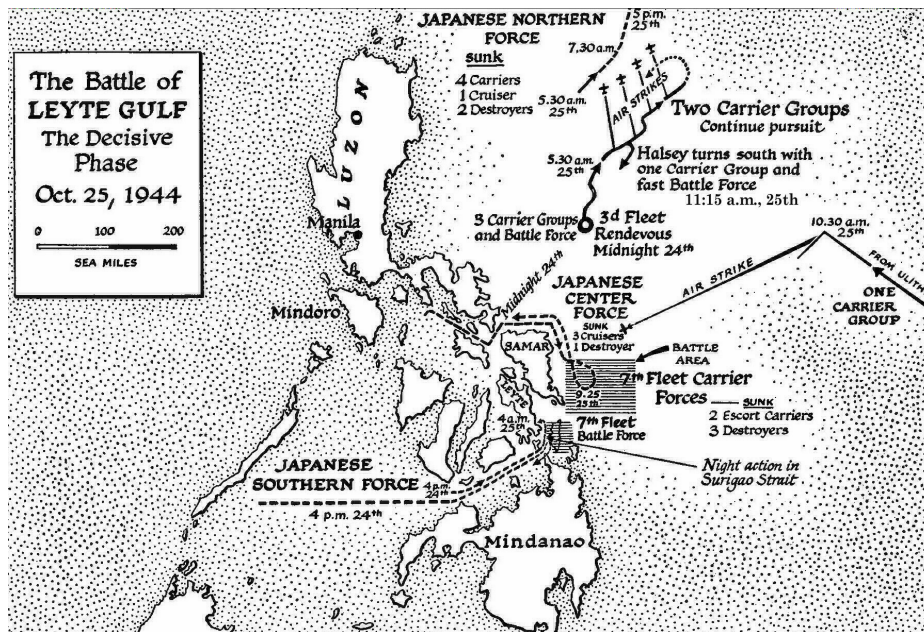
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A BABY FLATTOP SUCCUMBS to pounding by Jap battle force. *Gambier Bay*, like her sister CVEs, proved Combustible, Vulnerable, and Expendable. But Taffy 3 turned back four battleships, eight cruisers and a dozen destroyers. Story on Page 3. "Freedom's Cost," painted by Richard C. Moore.



IN THE OPENING PHASE, Kurita and Nishimura steamed from Brunei in Borneo, taking different routes to Leyte Gulf. Shima sailed from the Inland Sea and would follow Nishimura through Surigao Strait while Kurita would transit San Bernardino Strait. The two forces would meet at the invasion beaches on the east coast of Leyte, crushing the American Seventh Fleet in a pincers. Ozawa, sailing as a decoy from the Inland Sea, would draw off Halsey's Third Fleet.



FIVE SEPARATE ACTIONS made up the Battle of Leyte Gulf. 1.) Submarines attacked Kurita's force in the Palawan Passage. 2.) Third Fleet engaged Kurita with aircraft in Sibuyan Sea. 3.) Seventh Fleet battleships, cruisers and destroyers blocked Nishimura in Surigao Strait. 4.) Seventh Fleet escort carriers, destroyers and destroyer escorts repelled Kurita in the main battle off Samar. 5.) The Jap decoy force under Ozawa was engaged by the Third Fleet off Cape Engaño. These maps are taken from *Triumph and Tragedy*, volume six of Winston Churchill's history of World War II.

Churchill's Dispatches to MacArthur, Roosevelt

Winston Churchill, en route home from Moscow, saw Leyte's importance and took time to wire MacArthur "Heartly congratulations on your brilliant stroke in the Philippines" following the landings at Leyte. But following the naval engagement, he wired Roose-

velt "Pray accept my most sincere congratulations, which I tender on behalf of His Majesty's Government, on the brilliant and massive victory gained by the sea and air forces of the United States over the Japanese in the recent heavy battles."

Surigao Strait Action - Oldendorf's Battleline Annihilates Nishimura

Shima Steams into Strait,
Sees Wreckage, Steams Out

The Japanese southern force that would transit Surigao Strait consisted of two parts. Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura would lead with two battleships, a heavy cruiser and four destroyers. Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima would follow with another two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and seven destroyers. Nishimura had been discovered the morning of 24 October 1944 by search planes from Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet and attacked later in the morning, but he suffered little damage and the attacks soon shifted to Admiral Takeo Kurita's much stronger center force in Sibuyan Sea. Nishimura resolutely sailed on and entered Surigao Strait at 0244 on 25 October. Preparations had been made for his arrival.

Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid had passed down the order, "Prepare for night engagement," 12 hours earlier, almost to the minute. At 1445 on the 24th, the dispatch was logged aboard *Louisville* (CA 28), the flagship of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, commander of the Leyte bombardment and fire support group.

Oldendorf had a powerful force -- six battleships, *Pennsylvania* (BB 38), *Tennessee* (BB 43), *California* (BB 44), *Maryland* (BB 46), *West Virginia* (BB 48) and *Mississippi* (BB 41); four heavy cruisers, four light cruisers and 28 destroyers. Of the battleships, only *Mississippi* was not a veteran of Pearl Harbor. *California* and *West Virginia* had been sunk and raised, the others severely damaged. Japan had thought she had put them out of the war. They were back and carried a grudge.

Oldendorf called his commanders aboard *Louisville* to explain his plan. He would plug up Surigao Strait, placing his battleline squarely across its Leyte exit. The battleline would steam

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Did MacArthur Sleep Through Surigao Battle?

Naval History Magazine
Got its History Wrong

“Conveniently missing from the dramatic Battle of Surigao Strait was General Douglas MacArthur’s flagship, the light cruiser *Nashville* — with the war hero out of harm’s way.”

Naval History magazine chose those words to lead a story written by retired U.S. Navy Vice Admiral W. D. Houser. The title of the article was “While MacArthur Slept.”

Admiral Houser told us that after denying a request by Seventh Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid that he go ashore so *Nashville* could participate in an expected battle, MacArthur asked where Kinkaid would be. When Kinkaid said he would be aboard his command ship *Wasatch*, MacArthur said he would join him there, according to Admiral Houser.

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Hook, Line and Sinker -

Halsey Abandons Kinkaid To Chase Jap Decoy Force

“WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK FORCE THIRTY-FOUR — THE WORLD WONDERS.”

The message from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, angered Admiral William F. Halsey, and well it should have. And, though the final three words were padding, designed to confuse Japanese cryptanalysts, many think the rebuke was well-earned.

Halsey was the guard dog that went rabbit hunting on his own.

When much was at stake on Leyte’s invasion beaches, Halsey had left his post to chase a decoy force of Jap aircraft carriers, taking his entire force with him and allowing Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita to debouch unmolested from San Bernardino Strait, bringing with him a force very nearly the equal of that defending the beaches.

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In U.S. Navy’s Heroic Battle off Samar, 3 Destroyers, 4 DEs, 6 Baby Flattops Turn Back 4 Jap Battleships, 8 Cruisers

At no other time in the history of the United States Navy has heroism, self-sacrifice and dedication to the ideals of the service been displayed on the scale it was during the Battle off Samar, fought on 25 October 1944.

“I have not yet begun to fight,” called John Paul Jones from the sinking *Bonhomme Richard* at Flam-borough Head in 1779 as he prepared to board and take *Serapis*. “Don’t give up the ship” implored mortally wounded James Lawrence of his untrained crew in the unsuccessful 1813 action between his frigate *Chesapeake* and the British *Shannon*.

No such felicitous phrases were uttered by Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague, and that may be why the Battle off Samar, the main part of the greater Battle of Leyte Gulf, is so little remembered today. And make no mistake. This was the main battle, even though it was fought with the puniest of American forces.

Sprague was commander of Task Unit 77.4.3, better known by its radio call name of Taffy 3. Taffy 3 consisted of six escort carriers mass produced by Kaiser Industries in Vancouver, Wash., and their “screen” of three destroyers and four destroyer escorts. Taffy 3 was one of three such units under the command of Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, no relation to Taffy 3’s boss. Thomas Sprague reported to Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, commander of the Seventh Fleet, who reported to General Doug-

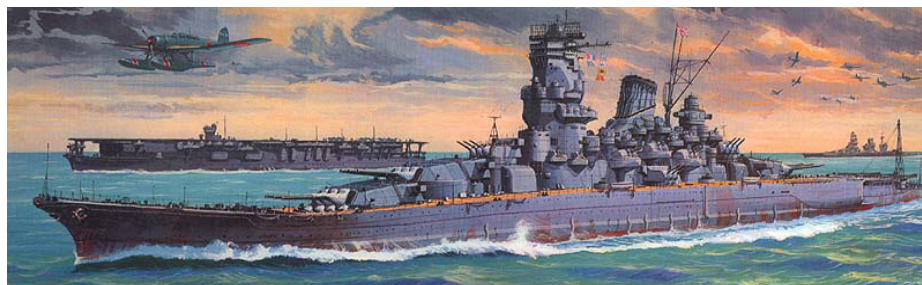
las MacArthur.

The Taffys, operating in assigned areas east of Leyte Gulf, were charged with providing air support for MacArthur’s forces and maintaining combat air patrol over the amphibious forces and anti-submarine patrol for all of Leyte Gulf. They were not expected to engage in surface combat, nor were they equipped to do so. At about 0530 on the morning of 25 October, the Taffys launched morning patrol aircraft. Taffy 3 was about 60 miles due east of Borongan, now the provincial capital of Eastern Samar.

Aboard his command ship *Wasatch*, Kinkaid was occupied with replenishing his ships that had taken part in the invasion and the Battle of Surigao Strait. Even if they had been rearmed and ready to sail, Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf’s heavy combatants were more than three hours from Taffy 3 and nine hours from the north of Samar and San Bernardino Strait. Kinkaid was not concerned about this back door to Leyte Gulf. Admiral William F. Halsey and his powerful Third Fleet were protecting his backside. Even so, he had sought confirmation from Halsey at 0412.

But Halsey, thinking his aircraft had ended whatever threat might emerge from San Bernardino Strait, had swallowed the Japs’ bait hook, line and sinker. He had taken his entire force to engage Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa’s decoy force of four carriers

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JAPANESE superbattleship *Yamato* was “unsinkable,” but her sister *Musashi* had been sunk by carrier planes in the Battle of Sibuyan Sea. In the Battle off Samar, she fired her 18-inch guns for the first time in anger, at thin-skinned escort carriers, destroyers and destroyer escorts.

Surigao Strait Was Well-Laid Trap for Jap Ships

(Continued from page 2)

at a majestic 5 knots so it would not have to countermarch frequently. He stationed his cruisers parallel to the battleships at the southern end of the battleline except for three, including HMAS *Shropshire*, at the other end. Six picket destroyers would be sent deep into the strait while six other squadrons would parallel the battleline at increasing depth into the strait.

"Our plan of battle was to use torpedoes and heavy gunfire," Oldendorf said, "the former to slow down the enemy, the latter to destroy him completely." There was another element to the welcoming committee. Thirteen sections of three PT boats each were patrolling the Mindanao Sea and the entrance to the strait. The boats had been shadowing Nishimura, reporting his consist and position, since 1100 when Nishimura spotted them, and took them under fire, damaging three lightly. With his position known, Nishimura radioed that he was under attack by torpedo boats. It was the first Shima had heard of his whereabouts.

Nishimura formed his ships with two destroyers leading, followed in column by the battleships *Yamashiro* (Nishimura's flagship) and *Fuso* with the heavy cruiser *Mogami* bringing up the rear and two more destroyers flanking the flagship. Now it was the U.S. destroyers' turn, and Desron 54 prepared to attack the Japs with torpedoes. On board *Monssen* (DD 798) they knew about night torpedo attacks, having fought them in the Solomons when the Japs usually won. It would be different this night.

Shortly before 0300, the destroyers made their run in two groups, led by *Remey* (DD 688), at 30 knots. As the first group loosed their torpedoes at 0301, the Japs flicked on their searchlights and were right on target. The destroyers dodged gunfire as they made their escape, waiting to see if their torpedoes found their targets. At least one from *Melvin* (DD 680) did, so severely damaging *Fuso* that she pulled out of line. Nishimura was unaware of this and continued to send *Fuso* orders she could not obey. *Fuso*

would blow in half at about 0344, the two halves sinking between a half-hour and an hour later.

The second group did even better. *Monssen* and *McDermut* (DD 677) launched torpedoes at about 0310 and, as they turned away, saw them hit. They didn't know what they had hit, but after the war it was learned that *Monssen* had scored on *Yamashiro*, failing to stop her and *McDermut* had hit three different destroyers. *Yamagumo* was fatally hit, *Michishio* was damaged and *Asagumo* had her bow blown off and was forced to retire.

At 0302, Desron 24 had been ordered to attack, again in two sections.



Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf

HMAS *Arunta* was in the second division. At 0319 *Yamagumo* blew up from *McDermut's* torpedo and lit up the scene for Desron 24. The fortunes of war were smiling on the Americans and would not stop this night. *Killen* (DD 593) launched five torpedoes at *Yamashiro* at 0325 and scored one hit, slowing the Jap flagship. *Hutchins* (DD 476) sent five fish at the destroyer *Asagumo* at about 0350. They missed, but the crippled *Michishio* turned into their path, took all five, blew up and sank. A third attack may have scored hits on *Yamashiro*, but it was time for the big guns to take over. *Albert W. Grant* (DD 649) became the first U.S. destroyer casualty on this run, absorbing 18 hits that stopped her dead. She was saved by *Newcomb* (DD 586), which hauled her clear.

The major gunfire portion of the battle began at 0351. Nishimura had been in the strait proper for only 67 minutes and had lost a battleship and two destroyers sunk and a destroyer

retired. He pressed on.

Orders had been given to open fire with the heavy guns when the range dropped to 26,000 yards. The cruisers opened fire first and the battleships joined in at 0353. Nishimura steamed on, thinking *Fuso* was still with him, but accompanied only by the heavy cruiser *Mogami* and the destroyer *Shigure*. He was so busy, he neglected to inform Shima what was going on.

The once-sunk *California* and *West Virginia*, along with *Tennessee*, had the latest fire control radar and had the enemy in their "sights" long before he came within range. Between them, they got off about 230 rounds of 16-inch and 14-inch armor-piercing fire. Most of the fire descended on *Yamashiro*, which was returning fire but not hitting anything. At 0409 the battleline was ordered to cease fire because U.S. destroyers were threatened by "friendly" fire. When fire was ordered resumed at 0419, no targets were to be found. *Yamashiro* had sunk, Nishimura going down with her, and a battered *Mogami* had retired with *Shigure*. *Mogami* would be attacked twice by PT boats before exiting the strait and by aircraft at 0833. She was abandoned at 0910. Of Nishimura's Southern Force, only the destroyer *Shigure* escaped.

Dropping back one hour in time, we find Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima rounding the tip of Panaon Island heading for Surigao Strait with two heavy cruisers, *Nachi* and *Ashigara*, a light cruiser, *Abukuma* and four destroyers. At 0325, a torpedo delivered by a PT boat holed *Abukuma*, slowing her to 10 knots, and forcing her to drop out of line. At 0410, Shima passed what he thought were two large burning ships. It was the two halves of *Fuso*. Fifteen minutes later he encountered the stricken *Mogami*, and *Nachi* actually collided with her. Shima now realized what had happened to Nishimura, came about and retired, taking *Mogami* and *Shigure* with him.

That was the end of the Battle of Surigao Strait, but it was not the end of Shima's problems. *Mogami* was sunk by aircraft as she retreated and Oldendorf's cruisers and destroyers caught up with the damaged *Asaguma* and sent her to the bottom.

About Those Signal Flags Across the Top of Page 1

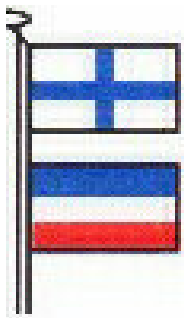
Perhaps the most famous signal ever sent by a commander to his fleet was that of Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson as he was about to engage the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar almost two hundred years ago.

Across the top of page 1 of this issue of Mission: History are the signals Nelson ordered flown shortly before noon on 21 October 1805. Reading left to right, the flags say "England – expects – that – every – man – will – do – his – d – u – t – y."



ON BOARD NELSON'S FLAGSHIP as his signals man lays out the flags for his famous invocation to his fleet. A print after a painting by T. Davidson

As the signal broke on board *Victory*, cheers rang out throughout the fleet and a band on the flagship played "England Strikes Home," even though the battle was being joined. Fifteen minutes later, Nelson signaled again. "Engage the enemy more closely."



Had Nelson flown the signal that first occurred to him, "Nelson expects ..." the cheers would have echoed down the centuries, according to the Nelson Society.

Neither the French nor the Spanish fleets had a system of signals by which a commander could communicate orders.

1805: Nelson's Victory at Trafalgar Still 'Most Important Ever' to Many

The Nelson Touch

Alfred Thayer Mahan, in his *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660 - 1783*, allows himself to slip into the nineteenth century to speak of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, the hero of the Nile, Copenhagen and the battle at hand today, Trafalgar.

The British fleet won the Battle of

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Battle Created a Lasting Public Pride in Royal Navy

Throughout most of the world, and certainly all of the English-speaking world except the United States, the most important naval engagement in all history was the Battle off Cape Trafalgar, fought on 21 October 1805 between the English fleet under Lord Horatio Nelson and the combined French and Spanish fleet led by the Comte de Pierre Charles Jean Baptiste Silvestre Villeneuve.

The United Kingdom is today in the middle of a ten-year celebration of Nelson and his battles. Called "The Nelson Decade," it will culminate on the 200th anniversary of Trafalgar. No American commander or battle has been so honored. Trafalgar is important.

Nelson lost his life at Trafalgar, providing a tangible link between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy. That is something that Companions of the Naval Order should reflect on every time they see a bluejacket, for the enlisted man's black kerchief is a symbol of mourning for Nelson. Some say that the three stripes on his cuff represent Nelson's three great victories, at Copenhagen, the Nile and Trafalgar.

Bonaparte's Navy Destroyed

If we strip away the Byzantine diplomacy that pervaded Europe at the time, ignore the ambitions of the Corsican and disregard baffling command structures of the armed services during the Napoleonic Wars, the Battle of Trafalgar becomes simple, and Nelson would have it no other way.

Nelson left Portsmouth on 14 September, his flag in *Victory* and accompanied by *Euryalus*, *Ajax* and *Thunderer*. Taking command of the Mediterranean fleet off Cadiz, he immediately withdrew his main force beyond the horizon. As Nelson was sailing to join the fleet, Napoleon ordered Villeneuve to sail "when conditions were favorable." On 19 October, he got a few ships out of harbor and on the 20th the remainder of the combined fleet sailed.

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A Nelson Captain Writes In Remorse of His Death

(Captain Henry Blackwood of the 36-gun frigate *Euryalus* wrote to his wife from on board ship the day following the Battle of Trafalgar. Portions of his letter appear in the story that follows.)

When Captain Henry Blackwood called on Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson at his home in Merton on 2 August 1805, he was greeted with "I am sure you bring me news of the French and Spanish fleets."

Blackwood told him that the French had re-fitted and were now at Cadiz, in company with the Spanish, and begged Nelson to offer his services as commander of the English fleet that would face Bonaparte's combined fleet.

(Continued on page 6)

Nelson Broke Through Villeneuve's Line, And Raked the Enemy Ships Stem to Stern

(Continued from page 5)

Villeneuve had 33 ships of the line, 15 of them Spanish, five frigates and two smaller ships. The combined fleet sailed southwest to clear Cape Trafalgar, a promontory half way between Cadiz and Gibraltar, and continued south southwest. Nelson's "eyes," a small squadron led by Capt. George Duff in *Mars*, reported every move.

Nelson, with 27 ships of the line, four frigates, a sloop and a cutter, including Duff's squadron which was detached, at

first ordered a general chase but during the night placed his fleet between Villeneuve and Cadiz. The French commander, expecting to be attacked during the night, had tried to form a battle order in the darkness. As a result, when the two fleets sighted each other at daybreak, the combined fleet was in disarray. Villeneuve ordered his ships to form a reverse order and as they attempted to do so in light airs, they took on a shallow crescent formation, with overlapping elements.



IN THE DAYS OF SAIL there was no shortage of things for men cast into the sea to cling to. This painting by W. L. Wyllie depicts the scene at Trafalgar at about 1430, when the battle was winding down. *Victory* is in the center and what's left of *Santisima Trinidad* is on the far right.

'Buonaparte' Has Not Learned to Cope with English at Sea

(Continued from page 5)

So it was that the two sailed from England, Nelson with his flag in *Victory* and Blackwood in command of *Euryalus*. Blackwood was with his hero from before the beginning until after the end. The day following the battle, he wrote to his wife.

My heart ... is sad and penetrated with the deepest anguish. A Victory, such a one as has never been achieved, yesterday took place in the course of five hours; but at such an expense, in the loss of the most gallant of men, and best of friends, as renders it to me a Victory I never wished to have witnessed — at least on such terms. After performing wonders by his example and coolness, Lord Nelson was wounded by a French Sharpshooter, and died three hours after, beloved

and regretted in a way not to find example.

[A]nd such an Admiral has the Country lost, and every officer and man, so kind, so good, so obliging a friend as never was. Thank God, he lived to know that such a Victory never was before gained.

Lord Nelson has left cause for every man who had a heart never to forget him....I stayed with him until the enemy commenced their fire on the Victory, when he sent me off. He told me, at parting, we should meet no more; he made me witness his Will, and away I came with a heart very sad.

Under Lord N. it seemed like inspiration. The last signal he made was such a one as would immortalize any man, 'England expects that every man will do his duty.'

Though the fleets were only 11 miles apart, it took six hours for Nelson to close. He was arranged in two lines, leading the windward line in *Victory* with Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood leading the lee line in *Royal Sovereign*. Shortly before noon, Nelson sent his famous "England expects" signal and followed it quickly with "Engage the enemy more closely."

At about noon, the first shots were fired as Collingwood broke through the combined fleet line behind the 112-gun *Santa Ana*, firing each of his guns in succession along the Spanish ship's deck, killing almost 400 seamen. About 20 minutes later, *Victory* approached the 130-gun *Santisima Trinidad*. All at once six or seven ships fired broadsides into *Victory* and Nelson said to Capt. Thomas Masterman Hardy, "This is too warm work to last long." At 1300, *Victory* passed slowly behind *Santisima Trinidad*, repeating Collingwood's tactic, killing about 300 of her company and putting her out of the battle. Much the same was taking place as other British ships penetrated Villeneuve's line in a tactic that would forever be called "The Nelson Touch."

After *Victory* had done with *Santisima Trinidad*, the French 74-gun *Redoubtable* closed close abeam and fired one broadside. When the smoke drifted away, marksmen in her fighting tops rained fire on the English flagship and Nelson fell to one knee.

"They have done for me at last," he said to Hardy. As the afternoon wore into evening, Nelson's life drained away, but as it did he heard cheers in the English fleet as ships in the combined fleet struck their colors. Though some British ships were reduced to little more than hulks, they all fought on and none struck its colors. In the end, 17 of Villeneuve's ships of the line had been taken and one caught fire and exploded. Only 15 escaped and four of those were taken two weeks later.

As a result of the battle, Napoleon was denied control of the sea and the threat of an invasion of England was gone, but his victories ashore continued. The real importance of Trafalgar was its effect on the British public. It created a national pride in the Royal Navy that persists to this day.

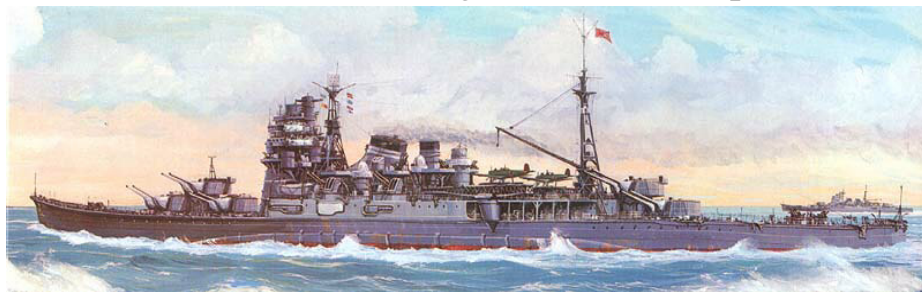
Subs Darter, Dace Ambush Kurita in Palawan Passage, Sink Two Jap Cruisers

Two Japanese forces left Borneo on 22 October 1944, bound for Leyte Gulf by different routes. The smaller force of two battleships, a heavy cruiser and four destroyers under Admiral Shoji Nishimura would cross the Sulu Sea and transit Surigao Strait to Leyte.

The main Japanese force under Admiral Takeo Kurita, consisting of five battleships, 10 heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and 15 destroyers, would navigate the treacherous Palawan Passage, along the western side of the island of Palawan on the edge of the South China Sea. From there, he would sail through the Sibuyan Sea and the San Bernardino Strait to reach the Philippine Sea. An eight-hour cruise would take him to Leyte Gulf.

Two of Kurita's battleships were *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the largest warships in the world at 68,000 tons and carrying nine 18-inch guns. Those ships, in theory, would allow Kurita to stand off from the fast U.S. Iowa-class battleships and pick the American fleet apart at long range.

It was a voyage fraught with perils that would tax any sailor and Kurita was not at his best. For reasons un-



THE HEAVY CRUISER *Atago* was Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's flagship, until the U.S. submarine *Darter* torpedoed and sank her, putting the Jap commander in the water. Also in on the ambush, *Dace* torpedoed two heavy cruisers, sinking *Takao* and forcing *Maya* to return to Brunei.

known, he had failed to deploy a screen in front of his heavy ships as he proceeded northeast through the Palawan Passage, his flag in the heavy cruiser *Atago*. Two American submarines were waiting, *Darter* (SS 227) and *Dace* (SS 247). The two subs had met to exchange information and were not anticipating meeting a major part of the Japanese fleet. As they lay side by side in the early hours of 23 October, *Darter's* radar picked up a possible group of ships. *Dace's* radar confirmed the contact. The subs' coordinated their plans and went after what they thought was a large force of enemy ships. They were correct.

Darter drew first blood at about

0530 when she torpedoed and sank *Atago*, putting Kurita literally in the water. *Dace* was not far behind, torpedoing and sinking one heavy cruiser *Takao* and severely damaging another, *Maya*, which was sent back to Brunei with two destroyers as escorts. Kurita, fished from the water, transferred his flag to *Yamato*.

The experience cannot have been salubrious for Kurita. Moreover, his staff became scattered when members were rescued by different ships. How much these disquieting experiences affected him later in the Battle off Samar is unknown, but they didn't help. He sailed on toward the Sibuyan Sea, three heavy cruisers lighter.

It Takes 19 Torpedo Hits to Sink Unsinkable *Musashi* in Battle of Sibuyan Sea

Following their ambush early on 23 October by two American submarines in Palawan Passage, the presence of Kurita's ships was known but their position was not. After sinking two heavy cruisers and putting a third out of the war, the subs did not stay near the surface to admire their work. The Americans knew, though, that at least two forces were converging on Leyte Gulf and by that evening preparations were being made for battle.

On the morning of 24 October, Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet was lying in the Philippine Sea, northeast of Leyte where Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet had landed General Douglas MacArthur's forces on the 20th. Kinkaid's fleet was still providing fire support for the Sixth Army and for its own transports and auxiliaries. Halsey positioned one task group near Leyte Gulf, another near

San Bernardino Strait and a third farther north off the east coast of Luzon. A fourth task group had been released to go to Ulithi to replenish. Each task group consisted of three or four big carriers, two fast battleships and around 20 cruisers and destroyers.

Shortly after dawn on the 24th, all three task groups launched search planes to look for Kurita's force. At 0812, a plane from *Intrepid* (CV 11) spotted *Yamato* as Kurita was entering Tablas Strait east of Mindoro. At 0827, Halsey ordered his three task groups to concentrate off San Bernardino Strait and recalled the fourth. By noon, he had his three groups together but, before he could launch an air attack on Kurita, land-based Jap planes attacked the northern task group, commanded by Rear Admiral Frederick C.

Sherman. Three raids of around 50 planes each were largely repulsed, but not before the light carrier *Princeton* (CVL 23) was mortally wounded. Though land-based, at least some of the attacking planes were navy types, which would later lead Halsey to think there were enemy carriers nearby.

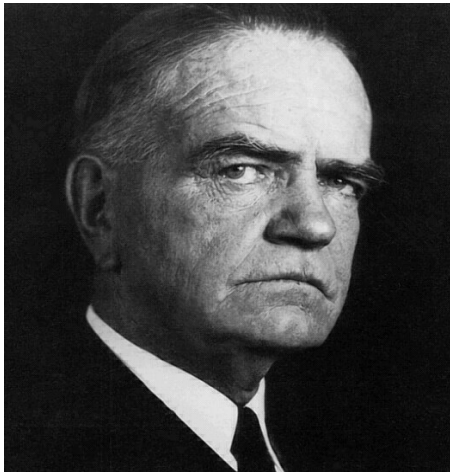
As Halsey's three groups were concentrating north of Samar, they were launching aircraft to strike Kurita. By 1030 the Japanese force was under attack. *Yamato* was hit by a bomb that failed to penetrate her deck, *Musashi* was hit by a torpedo but she was protected by an anti-torpedo bulge, and the heavy cruiser *Myoko* was hit by a torpedo that did enough damage to send her back to Brunei. When the attack finally broke off, Kurita had lost a fourth heavy cruiser.

(Continued on page 14)

Japan Had Insisted on Defending the Indefensible , Now She Was Forced to Gamble Her Entire Navy

(Continued from page 1)

Following the Battle of Midway in June of 1942, Japan's fortunes were still on the ascendancy but, instead of pausing to draw a breath, to build aircraft carriers and train pilots to replace the losses sustained at Midway, she continued to dream of new conquests — India, perhaps Australia.



Admiral William F. Halsey

When the Americans began to re-take islands recently won by conquest, there were no Dunkirks for Japan, no saving men and materiel to fight again, with the benefit of shorter internal lines of communication. The orders went out: Fight to the last man. And as it was with Hitler and Stalingrad, the policy spelled the end of empire for Japan.

Only the Japanese navy was spared the terrible attrition imposed by this policy, though its remaining carriers had the greenest of pilots to fly their aircraft. The Imperial Japanese Navy continued to thirst for a showdown with the American fleet — the one decisive battle that could change the course of the war. But naval warfare was changing, no longer would heavy ships slug it out with other heavy ships. Beginning with the Battle of the Coral Sea, followed by Midway, conflict at sea shifted from battleship warfare to carrier warfare.

In June of 1944, Japan thought she had a chance for the naval showdown when a strong American fleet appeared

at the invasion of Saipan. The Jap fleet came out in force for the first time in nearly two years, with five battleships. Five fleet carriers and four light carriers carried 473 airplanes. In the ensuing air battles, 346 of those planes were shot down against only 30 American aircraft. That earned the Battle of the Philippine Sea the nickname, the Marianas Turkey Shoot, and that wasn't all. American submarines sank two Jap fleet carriers and pilots from USS *Belleau Wood* got a light carrier. By the end of the action, the Jap fleet had 35 aircraft left.

So it was, when on 20 October 1944 the American Seventh Fleet — MacArthur's Navy it was called because Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid reported to the general — landed four divisions of the U.S. Sixth Army on the southeastern corner of Leyte, in the Philippines. Kinkaid was supported by Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet, but Halsey reported to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. Command was not unified.

With the landing at Leyte backed by



Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid

most of the U.S. Navy's presence in the Pacific, the Japs put into effect a plan they hoped would enable their navy to deal the Americans a decisive blow, and restore momentum to Japan in a war not yet lost. The plan risked their remaining surface forces, but offered the remote possibility of destroying



Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita

the American fleet and isolating the Sixth Army.

The plan relied on a decoy force, and the Jap carriers, virtually impotent for lack of trained pilots, would be the bait. Under Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, four carriers and a dozen other ships including a pair of hybrid carrier-battleships would sail from the north and appear off northeast Luzon, drawing off Halsey's covering force.

A center force under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita would sail from Lingga Roads near Singapore with seven battleships, including the two most powerful in the world, *Yamato* and *Musashi*, each at 68,000 tons and carrying nine 18-inch guns. Kurita's flag was in the heavy cruiser *Atago* and he had 10 others. He also had two light cruisers and 19 destroyers — a truly formidable force. With Halsey absent, he would sail through San Bernardino Strait, north of Leyte, around the island Samar, and descend on Leyte Gulf.

Kurita would be met there by Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura with two more battleships, a heavy cruiser and four destroyers. Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima would follow Nishimura through Surigao Strait south of Leyte with another two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and seven destroyers.

What ensued were five separate battles, called collectively the Battle of Leyte Gulf. They were also five entirely different types of action. Each will be dealt with separately. At the end, there will be no Jap navy.

Opposing Forces Spot Each Other and Taffy 3 Doesn't Hesitate

(Continued from page 3)

and a dozen other ships including a pair of hybrid carrier-battleships. He had notified Kinkaid, but his message was confusing and the Seventh Fleet commander thought that at least one carrier group had been left behind. None was -- the back door to Leyte Gulf was left open to Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita who still had four battleships, six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and a dozen destroyers.

All that stood between Kurita and the Leyte beachhead, where ships were

and the lookouts believed they saw fleet carriers, cruisers and destroyers. Every ship was upgraded two notches, and if those ships were present, their battleships must be nearby. Kurita proceeded cautiously. At the same time, Taffy 3 saw flak as Kurita's ships shot at the Taffy 2 airplane. Radar aboard *Fanshaw Bay* (CVE 70) confirmed contact and visual sighting reported pagoda masts. Sprague sensibly turned tail, leaving the Jap fleet to Halsey.

As Kurita closed within 15 miles of

closest targets. The destroyer *Johnston* (DD 557) trailed the CVEs, laying white smoke from her fantail.

Johnston's skipper, Cdr. E. E. Evans, now informed his crew that their ship would "engage major portions of the Japanese fleet" and, without orders, turned toward the heavy cruisers *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Tone* and *Chikuma*. It was the spark, and at this point a squall shielded the escort carriers from the Japs' visual fire control.

At 0708, Thomas Sprague ordered all Taffys to launch all aircraft. From the 16 CVEs, 65 fighters and 44 TBMs (General Motors-built torpedo planes) were launched. Because of the haste, only a few of the TBMs carried torpedoes, and many planes were under fueled. After expending what ordnance they had, they continued to harass the Jap ships with dry runs, forcing them to take evasive action and confusing Kurita's battle line. Typical of the launch, *Gambier Bay* (CVE 73) was able to launch nine TBMs, two with torpedoes, two with depth charges, three with bombs and two with nothing.

Johnston was now in range of the Japs and began firing on *Kumano*. The fire was returned by five heavy cruisers, but none were able to hit the twisting tin can. For now. At 0716, Clifton Sprague, unaware of *Johnston's* action, ordered his destroyers to attack with torpedoes. Five minutes later, *Johnston* unloaded ten torpedoes at *Kumano*. They ran hot, true and on target. At least one, probably more, scored and put the Jap ship out of the fight.

The destroyer *Hoel* (DD 533) now came within range of the battleship *Kongo* and the Jap ship replied with her main batteries, hitting *Hoel's* bridge and engine room. At this point, the Taffys' aircraft arrived and badly damage the heavy cruiser *Suzuya*. *Johnston* and *Hoel* continued to be hit by 14-inch shells from *Kongo*, but received temporary respite when the rain squall shifted over them.

The cover of the squall had moved away from the escort carriers as they continued to flee south. Clifton Sprague



DESTROYER ESCORTS and *Gambier Bay* make smoke, but Kurita's force is upwind of Taffy 3 and the escort carrier remains exposed, becoming a focal point for guns ranging in size from 8 inches to 18 inches. Nevertheless, she fought bravely until succumbing to superior gunfire.

still unloading and the beach was piled high with the materials of war, was Task Group 77.4 -- the three Taffys.

Between 0530 and 0600, the Taffys launched aircraft for morning patrol and then settled down into routine with normal underway watches. At about 0630, a Taffy 2 plane sighted Kurita's force and closed within anti-aircraft range. When Clifton Sprague received the message, he thought the pilot had seen some of Halsey's ships and asked that identification be verified.

At 0645, Japanese lookouts spotted Taffy 3 masts on the horizon. Kurita also thought Halsey was in the area

Taffy 3, *Yamato's* 18-inch guns came to life, firing for the first time in anger, and the other Jap ships joined in with their heavy guns. Clifton Sprague sent a plain-language call for help and ordered his ships to make smoke. Kurita ordered a general attack. It was 0700.

At 0703, Kinkaid received a reply to the inquiry he had made of Halsey at 0412 and was appalled to learn that the three Taffys were all the protection he had for his back door. At the same time, 14-inch and 18-inch shells continue to rain on Taffy 3's escort carriers *White Plains* (CVE 66), *St. Lo* (CVE 63) and *Fanshaw Bay*, Kurita's

(Continued on next page)

Fury of Five-inch Guns Has Kurita Thinking He's Facing Cruisers



DESTROYERS DODGE SHELLFIRE making smoke. *Johnston* and *Hoel*, hidden by their own smoke and splashes from enemy gunfire, were mistaken by Jap spotters for cruisers. Perhaps they thought themselves cruisers — neither survived the day against the enemy's big guns.

gue asked Kinkaid for permission to move his force to the protection of Oldendorf's heavy ships. Kinkaid denied permission and Sprague deduced that his force was considered expendable. No surprise there; ask a sailor aboard a CVE what the initials mean and he's likely say "Combustible, Vulnerable, Expendable."

When the escort carriers exit the rain squall at about 0730, Kurita sends the heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Haguro* on an end run around their eastern side. Jap destroyers would attempt to get to the south of the CVEs to drive them back to the heavy ships. The U.S. destroyer *Heermann* (DD 532) at this time was racing at 30 knots through the CVEs in response to the order to engage and nearly collided with the destroyer escort *Samuel B. Roberts* (DE 413), so *Roberts* decided to do whatever she could to help.

Now, *Roberts* was even less of a threat to Kurita. You could put three of her side-by-side between the goal lines and sidelines of a football field without drawing a penalty. She was armed with two five-inch guns and three torpedo tubes. Her job was anti-sub patrols. Her skipper, Lt. Cdr. R. W. Copeland decided on his own to join the attack, just like Evans in *Johnston*. This sort of initiative was typical throughout the battle. Shortly thereafter, Sprague ordered his destroyer escorts to attack the Japs with torpedoes, so *Raymond* (DE 341) turned toward the enemy with the intent of sinking the cruiser *Haguro*.

By 0745, all three destroyers and

two of the four destroyer escorts were heavily engaged with the Jap heavy ships, though *Johnston* and *Hoel* had been badly damaged and could make only half-speed. The six baby flattops were once again under heavy fire and at least one, *Gambier Bay*, was chasing splashes, hoping the Jap gunners kept adjusting their aim. Some help arrived with a flight of TBMs from Taffy 2, which was 30 miles to the south -- two hours steaming for the CVEs and an hour for their escorts.

Shortly before 0800, destroyer escort *Dennis* (DE 405) arrived to find *Hoel*, *Heermann*, *Johnston* and *Roberts* conducting a torpedo attack on the Jap heavy cruiser line, though *Johnston* was firing her still operable guns, having expended her torpedoes. The jeep carrier *Kalinin Bay* (CVE 68) was hit by several 8-inch shells in quick succession, sustaining significant, but not serious, damage. The Japs were using armor-piercing ammo which passed through the thin-skinned CVE.

Hoel found herself in the middle of the Jap fleet and began taking hits from every size gun. More than 40 shells hit *Hoel*, flooding her engine room and causing her to lose headway. She developed a 20-degree list. It took almost an hour for the ship to sink, and during that time her two remaining guns continued to fire, expending between 250 and 300 rounds each, the gun crews doing it manually because all electric power had been lost.

But that was later, and it is now about 0800. Now we find *Roberts* only

4,000 yards from the Jap cruiser column, unseen because her small size kept her hidden among the splashes and smoke. She fires her three torpedoes at the heavy cruiser *Chokai* and turns tail. *Chokai* is hit and drops out of formation. Destroyer escorts *Dennis* and *Raymond* engage heavy cruisers *Haguro* and *Tone*, firing their full load of three torpedoes each. The fish miss, so *Dennis* goes after one of the ships with her five-inch guns.

Johnston continued to engage the heavy cruisers and after the war it is found that one ship had logged the action as being with an American heavy cruiser. At exactly 0800, *Heermann* fired her last three torpedoes at the battleship *Haruna*, and missed. But the torpedoes continued toward the super battleship *Yamato*, Kurita's flagship. *Yamato* turned away from the battle to present her stern to the torpedoes and rang up flank speed, taking Kurita away from the fight for a considerable period. This may have contributed to his later indecision and, if so, was a highly significant "near miss" for *Heermann*. Things were not going well for Kurita anyway. Taffy 3's TBMs hit *Haguro* and she joined *Chokai*, out of the battle.

Nevertheless, the Japanese fleet is closing the escort carriers, which turn from south to southeast and begin laying smoke. The two CVEs nearest the Japs are exposed, when their smoke drifts south. *Gambier Bay* and the already damaged *Kalinin Bay* are now the primary targets. The CVEs prepare to defend themselves with their single five-inch guns. Meantime, the remaining U.S. destroyers and destroyer escorts are returning to Taffy 3. *Johnston* and *Roberts* won't make it. At 0810, *Gambier Bay* is hit by eight-inch shells and fires break out.

Now a curious thing occurs. Spotters high in the pagoda masts of the Jap battleships *Haruna* and *Kongo* sight the escort carriers of Taffy 2 to the southeast and report that they have seen six CVLs of Halsey's fleet, giving Kurita something else to distract him. Taffy 2 was steaming into the wind to

(Continued on next page)

Johnston, Hoel and Roberts Unsurpassed in U.S. Navy History

(Continued from previous page)

launch aircraft, which brought it closer to the battle, but it never got too close.

Gambier Bay was taking the fire of five Jap cruisers and just about every hand was on damage control. Armor piercing ammo punched holes too numerous to count in the ship. A near miss buckled her plates, flooded her merous to count in the ship. A near miss buckles her plates, floods her engine room and sealed her fate. The other CVEs moved on without her.

Kinkaid, who had been following the reports from intership communication within Taffy 3, at 0822 radioed Halsey in plain language "FAST BATTLESHIPS ARE NEEDED IMMEDIATELY IN LEYTE GULF," the first of several urgent messages to "The Bull." But Kinkaid didn't know where Halsey was.

The Japanese continued to fire on *Gambier Bay*, by now a sitting duck, and at about 0830 *Kitkun Bay* (CVE 71) came under fire. Smoke hung heavy on the water and *Heermann*, rushing to aid *Johnston*, nearly collided with a CVE while racing through the group and then nearly ran over *Johnston*. As *Heermann* engaged *Chikuma*, she was joined by *Roberts*, whose effective fire knocked out the cruiser's No. 3 turret, destroyed her bridge and started fires. Destroyer escort *Butler*, the only Taffy 3 ship that still had torpedoes, also engaged *Chikuma* with her five-inch guns but couldn't get in position to launch her fish. *Johnston* is now audaciously firing on the battleship *Kongo*, scoring hits, while the Jap ship is returning fire and missing. At around 0845, *Heermann* is hit by eight-inch fire that kills most on her bridge. *Hoel* can be seen in the distance, abandoning ship.

Also at 0845, fresh TBMs arrive from Taffy 2 and go after the heavy cruiser *Suzuya*, fatally wounding her. The arrival of these aircraft was the first massed air attack on the Jap force, but it came too late to save *Gambier Bay*. At 0848 she was abandoned but, because of the press of the battle, her crew was not rescued from the sea for two days. Enemy gunfire shifts to *Fanshaw Bay* and she is hit several times.

Roberts puts on the brakes to avoid running into an enemy salvo and before she can get going she is hit by three shells, knocking out electricity and communications and rupturing a main steam line. The battleship *Kongo* takes up the attack on the little destroyer escort and hits her with all three rounds from a single turret.

By 0900, the Jap cruisers were focusing on *Kitkun Bay*, except for *Tone*,



AMERICAN SURVIVORS were not fished out of the Philippine Sea for two days following the battle. This picture was taken by U.S. Army Private William Roof

which hit *Dennis* with three shells. Taffy 2's aircraft now hit *Chikuma* with two torpedoes which start fires and *Kitkun Bay*'s planes score nine hits on *Chokai*, putting her out of action. Kurita sent a squadron of five destroyers led by the light cruiser *Yahagi* to attack the escort carriers with torpedoes at about 0905. *Johnston*, still afloat and still acting on her own, but limited to about 17 knots, took on all six, hitting the cruiser a dozen times with her five-inch guns. *Yahagi* and the destroyers fired their torpedoes prematurely and turned away. *Johnston*'s action earned her the attention of *Tone* and *Haguro*.

As the clock approached 0910, *Gambier Bay* rolled over and sank, *Kitkun Bay*, *White Plains*, *Fanshaw Bay* and *Kalinin Bay* were all being

repeatedly hit and the crew of *Roberts* had been ordered to abandon ship.

At 0911, Kurita signaled all his ships to break off the action and follow him north at 20 knots.

No one knows why Kurita did this, with destruction of Taffy 3 in his grasp and the road open to the Leyte Gulf landing grounds. He had not had an easy two days, with his flagship sunk from under him. He had been given outrageously inflated reports on the nature of the force he was facing. He had been taken out of the battle by virtue of *Yamato* evading torpedoes, and he was without a doubt dead tired. Still, no one knows why Kurita turned back when he did, and the answer was not forthcoming following the war.

The battle wasn't quite over, though. *Johnston* was being pummeled by the five destroyers she had engaged. She would sink at 1010. Several survivors reported independently that, as their ship slid beneath the waves, they saw an officer on board an enemy ship salute *Johnston* for her gallantry. *Roberts* sank about the same time.

The heavy cruisers *Chikuma* and *Chokai* sank at around 0930. At 1015, the heavy cruiser *Suzuya* is again attacked by aircraft and left sinking.

At around 1100, Taffy 3's escort carriers came under the first organized kamikaze attack of the war. *St. Lo* and some others were hit but *St. Lo*'s wounds were fatal. She sank at 1125.

Though Kurita made one more tentative move toward Leyte Gulf, it was short lived, and he headed for San Bernardino Strait. He had been deprived of his objective by a handful of the smallest surface combatants in the U.S. Navy and he had lost three heavy cruisers.

The Americans had lost two escort carriers, two destroyers and one destroyer escort. This one action had given the United States Navy four names it can pin up with *USS Constitution*, on her best day.

USS *Johnston*.

USS *Hoel*.

USS *Samuel B. Roberts*.

USS *Gambier Bay*

'Transfer from a Combatant Ship to a Noncombatant Ship? Never!'

(Continued from page 3)

Kinkaid said that would be impossible so, in the words of Admiral Houser, "while the battle of Surigao Strait raged 40 miles to the south, MacArthur slept in the flag cabin of the *Nashville*." The writer speculates that the general, "Having acquired the unflattering nickname 'Dugout Doug' during the war and being such a highly visible person, he may have imagined that he could anticipate 'Duckout Doug' being added to his nicknames if he left the ship just prior to its going into battle."

He closes his hit-piece, "Whatever the case, he slept while the *Nashville* sat out the Battle of Surigao Strait at anchor off Tacloban."

Another View

It is difficult to reckon where Admiral Houser might have done his research, and harder still to guess what prompted him to marshal his "facts" so that he could malign MacArthur. He writes that "discussions between MacArthur and Kinkaid cannot be verified," but he's wrong about that.

MacArthur's *Reminiscences* should be in Admiral Houser's library. The general says that he agreed on 23 October 1944 with Kinkaid that *Nashville* should take part in the coming battle and that he intended to go along, but Kinkaid would not hear of it. "All my life I had been reading and studying naval combat," MacArthur wrote, "and the glamour of sea battle had always excited my imagination."

Kinkaid would not employ *Nashville* with MacArthur aboard. "It was to be his fight," MacArthur said, adding he subsequently moved his headquarters ashore "and the *Nashville* moved out to take its [*sic*] honored position in the battle line."

William Manchester, in his soundly researched biography of MacArthur, *American Caesar*, reports the exchange essentially as MacArthur remembered it. Geoffrey Perret in his *Old Soldiers Never Die*, another biography, says that the general told Kinkaid "There is every reason why I should be present during such a crucial engagement," adding, "Besides, I have

never been in a major naval action and I am anxious to see one."

In *Battle Report*, a four-volume history of the U.S. Navy in the Second World War prepared from official sources by Capt. Walter Karig USNR, Lt. Cdr. Russell L. Harris USNR and Lt. Cdr. Frank A. Manson USNR, the authors tell of the unhappiness of *Nashville's* skipper, Capt. Charles Coney, at missing the fight.

"With the Battle of Surigao Strait coming up, I naturally wanted to get in there and mix it up," recalled Coney. "I went to General MacArthur and told him that I would like very much to take my ship into action and would it be asking too much of him if he would



MacArthur and Coney on *Nashville's* bridge.

transfer his staff in order that we might participate."

"No, I do not desire to leave your ship, Captain," the general smiled, "I have never been able to witness a naval engagement and this is the opportunity of a lifetime. Proceed to the battle area when you wish." Coney asked Kinkaid for instructions and was told to suggest that MacArthur join the admiral on *Wasatch*, quite the opposite of what Admiral Houser tells us. *Naval History* would have us believe that MacArthur "stated he would join Kinkaid on board the *Wasatch*."

What MacArthur said about that invitation, according to both *Battle*

Report and the 1994 Thomas J. Cutler book, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf: 23-26 October 1944*, was "Transfer from a combatant ship to a noncombatant ship? Never! I have never been in the middle of a naval engagement and I would like nothing better than being in one tonight."

Speculation about the possibility of the general's concern over the nickname "Duckout Doug" is juvenile and unbecoming a flag officer, but still to be answered is the question of whether the Battle of Surigao Strait took place "While MacArthur Slept."

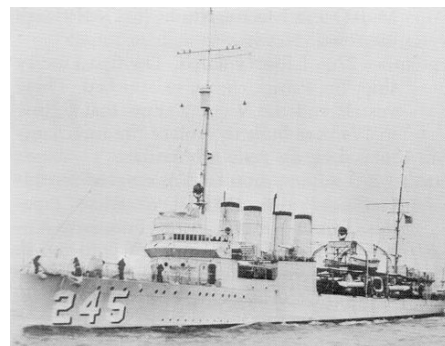
Quite the contrary. While the nighttime sky of Leyte Gulf was rent by the orange and white flashes of naval gunfire, the thunder of the guns was plainly audible at Tacloban, 40 miles to the north. By all accounts, MacArthur listened unhappily to the battle as he paced the deck of *Nashville*, confined like a caged lion to Kinkaid's cabin.

Ric Teague

1941: Four-Piper *Reuben James* First U.S. Ship Lost in WW II

While on convoy duty, escorting ships from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to England, the U.S. destroyer *Reuben James* (DD 245) was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-562, becoming the first American naval vessel lost to action in World War II.

At daybreak on 31 October 1944, *Reuben James* was on the port beam of "fast" convoy HX-156, making about nine knots 600 miles west of Ireland and had just begun turning to investigate a direction-finder bearing when she was struck on her port quarter by a torpedo which ignited the forward magazine. Of her complement of 160, only 45 enlisted men were rescued.



Bomb Wrecks Ship Bakery But Fires Spread to Explosives

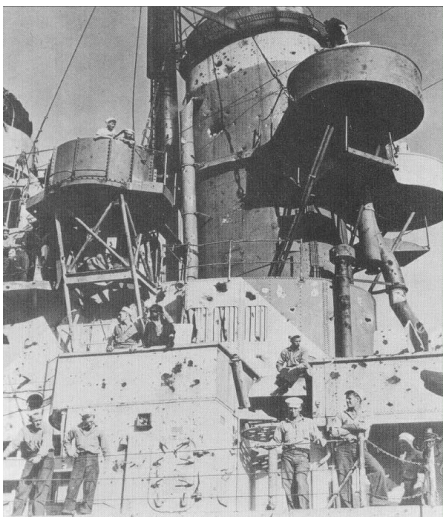
Shortly after 0800 on 24 October 1944, the Japs mounted their only successful air attack of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Three separate raids of around 50 aircraft concentrated on Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman's Group 3, one of three fast carrier groups.

The enemy planes were met by swarms of Hellcats and the American pilots had a field day. Cdr. David McCampbell shot down nine Nips.

At 0938, a single Yokosuka D4Y slipped through and planted a single 250-kilogram (550 pounds) bomb on the flight deck of *Princeton* (CVL 23). The bomb penetrated three decks and exploded in the ship's bakery, starting fires that invaded the hangar deck and exploded torpedoes in airplanes, blowing the elevators up and out. Capt. W. H. Buracker ordered all but a 240-man firefighting crew to abandon ship.

Destroyers were first ordered to aid the stricken carrier, but could not get close. At 1004, the light cruiser *Birmingham* (CL 62) was ordered to assist *Princeton* and pulled alongside.

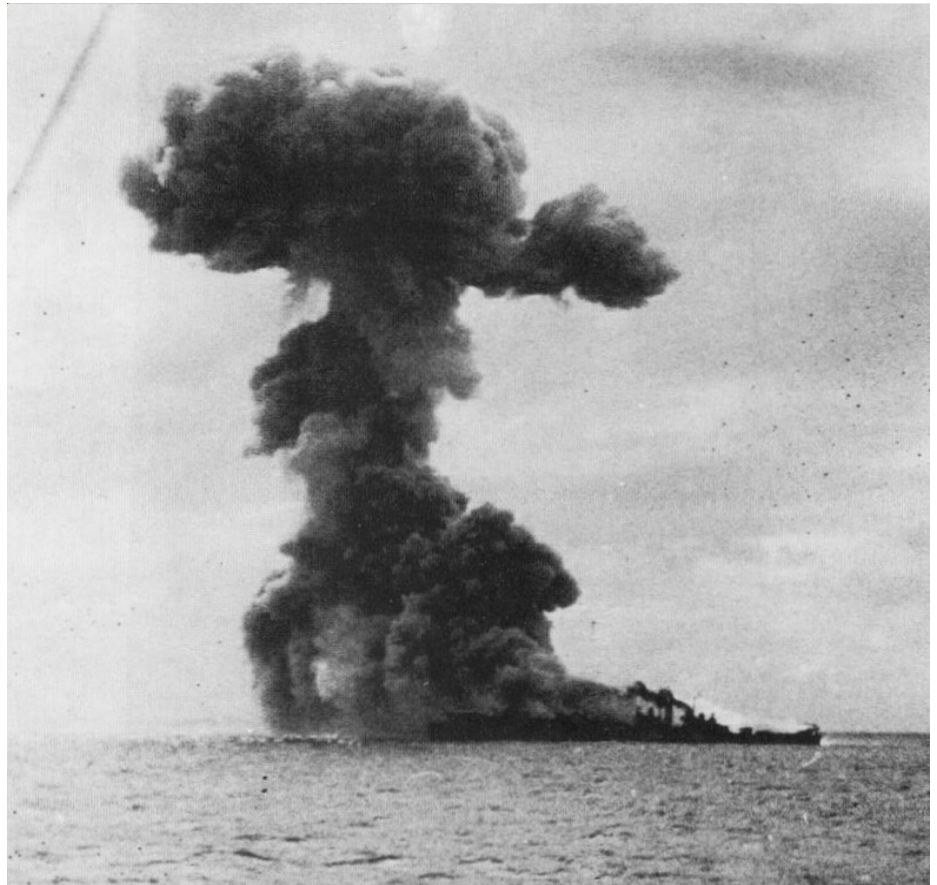
Lines and hoses were passed to the carrier and a party of firefighters went on board to help *Princeton's* crew. At 1330, *Birmingham* cast off because of a submarine report that turned out to be a false alarm. She returned to the carrier, her topsides crowded with sailors waiting to help *Princeton*. At 1523, the flames reached *Princeton's* torpedo stowage. The explosion killed 229 and injured 420 on *Birmingham*.



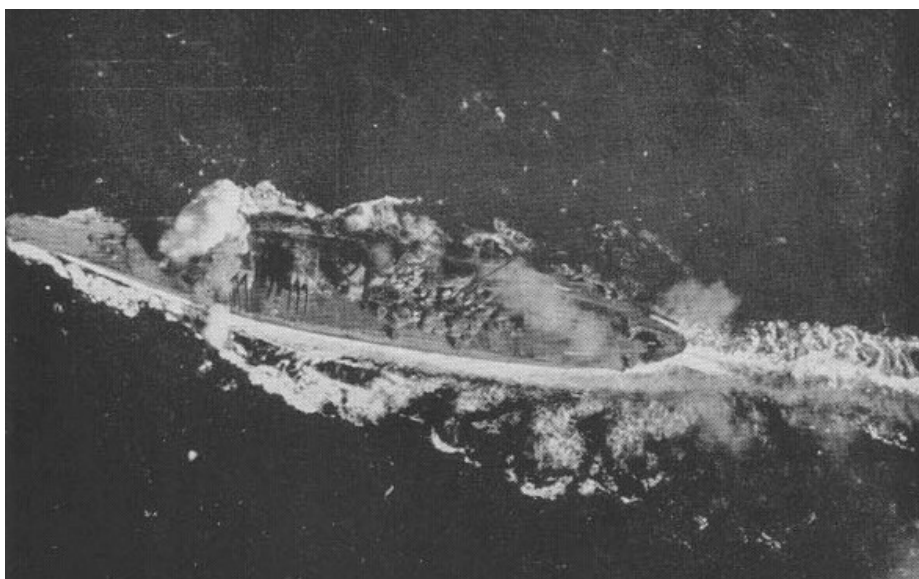
One 250 Kilogram Bomb Well Placed Causes Loss of *Princeton*, Carnage on *Birmingham*



THE LIGHT CRUISER *Birmingham* rigs lines and fire hoses to the stricken light carrier *Princeton* and sends a party of firefighters on board at shortly after 1000. *Princeton* had been hit by a single 550-pound bomb that started internal fires. On the hangar deck, exploding torpedoes blew both fore and aft elevators out of their holes. Flames threatened both torpedo and gasoline stowage.



WHEN THE FLAMES REACHED her torpedo stowage, *Princeton* exploded. Alongside, rendering assistance to the carrier, light cruiser *Birmingham* was ripped by pieces of carrier, large and small. The photo at left shows the damage to the cruiser, which was light, but 229 of her sailors died in the blast and another 420 were injured.



Sibuyan Sea a Victory, But Not the End of Kurita

Main Japanese Battle Force
Hesitates, But Keeps Coming

(Continued from page 7)

A second attack hit the Japs shortly after noon, concentrating on *Musashi*, which was hit by three more torpedoes. A third wave also focused on *Musashi*, hitting her with several bombs and a fifth torpedo. One of these torpedoes was a seeing-eye torpedo, and found a hole in the ship's protective bulge left by a previous torpedo. It penetrated her No. 4 engine room, flooding it and reducing her speed. A fourth attack found *Musashi* listing and went in for the kill. Holes in her deck vented smoke from fires below and her list increased. A fifth wave put five more torpedoes in the ship and Kurita ordered her to Brunei, with two destroyers and a cruiser. Then he turned his whole fleet around and headed back across the Sibuyan Sea, passing *Musashi* which was slowly steaming in circles without steering. At 1714, he decided to once more make for San Bernardino Strait.

As Kurita once more passed *Musashi*, he recalled the cruiser escort, leaving only the two destroyers at her bedside. Shortly after Kurita passed, *Musashi*, the invincible 68,000 ton super battleship, rolled over and sank. It had taken 10 bomb hits and an astonishing 19 torpedo hits to sink her. Only 18 planes were lost but, by concentrating on *Musashi*, they had left the remainder of the force undamaged.

Halsey knew that Kurita had turned away the first time, but not that he had resumed his approach to San Bernardino Strait. From his pilots' reports, he believed Kurita's force was finished. Because Sherman's task group had been attacked by navy type planes, he believed carriers were nearby. Thus, when air searches late in the day found the Jap decoy force of Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa off the northeast tip of Luzon, he took the bait. That part is understandable. What has never been answered is why he took his entire force with him.

HARRIED BY THIRD FLEET dive bombers and torpedo planes, *Musashi* takes violent evasive action in the top photo. At least two torpedo tracks are visible. In the second picture, the super battleship receives a bomb hit forward of the number one turret. Finally, low in the water, *Musashi* is shown being hit by at least three of the astonishing number of 19 torpedoes it took to sink her.

"WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK-FORCE THIRTY-FOUR — THE WORLD WONDERS"

(Continued from page 3)

One can say Halsey was only following orders, and be correct. In his 1994 book on the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Thomas J. Cutler presents a clear picture of the unclear orders laid down by Nimitz:

- Cover and support forces of Southwest Pacific in order to assist the seizure and occupation of objectives in the Central Philippines.
- Destroy enemy naval and air forces in or threatening the Philippine Area.
- In case opportunity for destruction of major portion of the enemy fleet offer [*sic*] or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task.

That last clause was the loophole Philadelphia lawyers look for, and has been used for more than 50 years to justify Halsey's chase after Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's decoy.

Halsey thought there was no danger from Kurita. His pilots had, in the Battle of Sibuyan Sea, sunk the super battleship *Musashi*, had forced the heavy cruiser *Myoko* to retire and caused Kurita to turn around. To hear Halsey's pilots tell it, Kurita was finished. But the Jap admiral had resumed his approach to San Bernardino Strait. Whatever the rationale, Halsey went after Ozawa with everything he had, and the ensuing action, a one-sided fight on 25 October 1944, is called the Battle of Cape Engaño.

Halsey had brought his three sections close together off San Bernardino Strait the previous day. On the night of the 24th, as they headed north off the east coast of Luzon, he formed Task Force 34, of six fast battleships, two heavy cruisers, five light cruisers and 18 destroyers, with Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr. in tactical command. The instructions issued were intercepted by the Seventh Fleet and it was assumed by Seventh Fleet commander Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid that Task Force 34 would be left guarding

San Bernardino Strait while Halsey went after Ozawa with three carrier groups.

At 0710 on the 25th, search planes from the carriers — Task Force 38 under Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher — spotted Ozawa's force and the first attack of 180 planes was launched. At 0800, the air attacks on the Japs began, meeting little opposition from Ozawa who had only 108 airplanes on his four carriers, and no experienced pilots.

At 0822, Halsey received a plain language call for help from Kinkaid saying that his escort carriers were under attack by a force of battleships and cruisers and that the Third Fleet's assistance was desperately needed. The message was ignored, as were subsequent calls for help, including one that told him that Seventh Fleet battleships were low on ammunition and would not be able to contend with the Jap force if it reached the landing beaches.

The first wave of American planes were having a field day with the Japs. After disposing of the 18 fighters that arose to meet them, the planes had the sky to themselves. The large carrier *Zuikaku* was hit with a torpedo that disrupted her steering gear. *Chitose*, a light carrier was bombed to death and sank. The light cruiser *Tama* was torpedoed and slowed to 13 knots. Light carriers *Zuiho* and *Choyoda* received bomb hits, forcing *Choyoda* out of line.

At 1000, Halsey received the message he couldn't ignore, from Nimitz.

"WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK FORCE THIRTY-FOUR -- THE WORLD WONDERS"

When Halsey saw that message he was livid and threw his hat on the deck in anger. As he considered what to do, Mitscher's planes pressed home the attack on the hapless Ozawa. *Zuikaku* and the light carrier *Zuiho* were trying to escape north so the pilots concentrated on them, sinking both. At 1115, Halsey decided to send help to Kinkaid. He ordered one of the carrier

groups and Task Force 34 south.

Mitscher, meanwhile, decided to use his cruisers to finish off the Japanese cripples. Rear Admiral L. T. DuBose took the heavy cruisers *Wichita* (CA 45) and *New Orleans* (CA 32), the light cruisers *Santa Fe* (CL 60) and *Mobile* (CL 63) and a dozen destroyers and went Jap hunting. Directed by a strike control airplane, a division of destroyers was sent to torpedo the stricken *Choyoda*, but before they could pull the trigger, she rolled over and sank.

DuBose then went after three destroyers, one of them the 2,400-ton *Hatsutsuki*, which aircraft had reported as a cruiser. At 1823, *Mobile* and *Wichita* began firing as the two smaller destroyers fled. When one of the latter joined the remnants of Ozawa's force, she reported that *Hatsutsuki* was engaging a surface force of two battleships, two large cruisers and a destroyer squadron. Ozawa did not intervene and, at 2100, *Hatsutsuki* went down by the bow, the last Jap ship sunk in the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Halsey had, at last, his "battle" with a carrier force. Against no American losses, the Japanese lost one large carrier, three light carriers, one light cruiser and two destroyers. Halsey had his victory over a Jap carrier force, but one thing still rankled.

"WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK FORCE THIRTY-FOUR -- THE WORLD WONDERS."

1891: Bar Brawl in Chile Strains International Amity Two U.S. Sailors are Slain In Fight at True Blue Saloon

Two American sailors were killed and 16 injured in a Friday night bar brawl at the True Blue Saloon in Valparaíso, Chile, on 16 October 1891.

Intemperate remarks by the Chilean foreign minister brought Chile and the U.S. to the brink of war.

Cooler heads prevailed when U.S. Navy officials discerned that the Chilean navy was superior to their own.

Breach the Enemy Line, Destroy Him Piecemeal, That's the Nelson Touch

(Continued from page 5)

Trafalgar, Mahan says, because "Nelson's intuitions and activity kept the English fleet ever on the track of the enemy, and brought it up in time at the decisive moment." Mahan pays tribute to "the great lessons of efficiency in preparation, of activity and energy in execution, and of thought and insight on the part of the English leader during the previous months."

Mahan is cited here because, to many, what is called "The Nelson Touch" consists only of tactics of the moment. Not so. Nelson worked at his trade full time.

The Nelson Society, which was of significant help in providing material including the chart showing disposition of the forces, notes that before Trafalgar as before the Battle of the Nile, Nelson "had briefed his Captains in fine detail" and had them drill their crews accordingly.

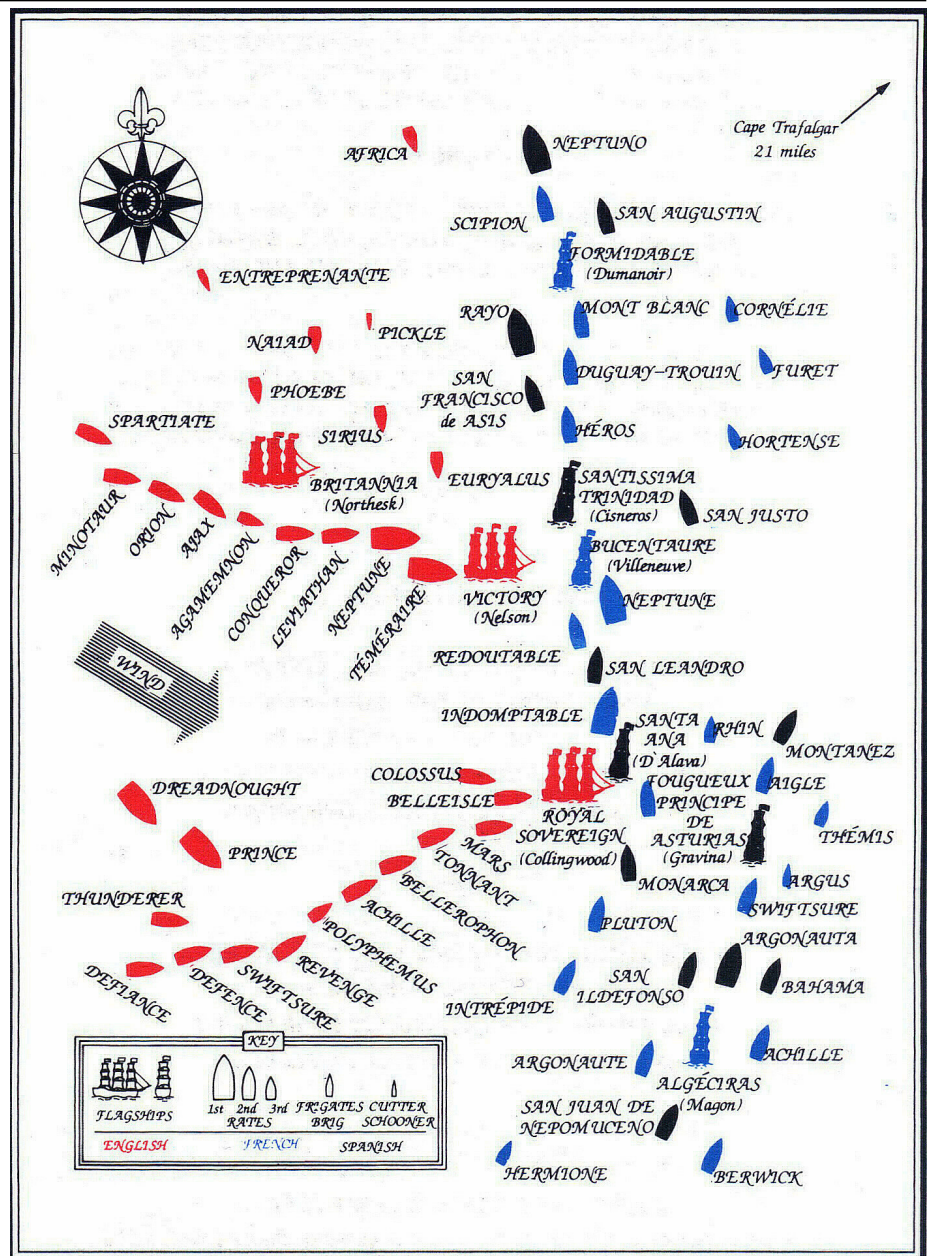
Still, Nelson was the first to sail, in line, at a fortified fleet arranged in line of battle. By doing so, he was able to break the enemy line into manageable segments. Enemy ships away from Nelson's points of contact were out of the battle and no danger. They could be rounded up in due course.

The Nelson Society

Mission: History owes thanks to The Nelson Society for permission to use its material, including the chart on this page showing disposition of the opposing forces at Trafalgar. Had we used it all, the publication would be twice as thick, for the Society is a treasure house devoted to Horatio Nelson.

Based in England, the Society publishes a quarterly journal, of about 50 pages, with the stated objective of promoting "public education and appreciation of the character and life of Admiral Lord Nelson."

In England, even after two centuries, new material keeps coming to light, in the form of old letters found in musty attics, church records and the like.



DISPOSITION OF FORCES at noon on 21 October 1805. To sail at an enemy head-on, breaking his line at two or more places, and then destroying him piecemeal became known as "the Nelson Touch," but it relied on superior ships, sailors, seamanship, gunnery and command.

Nelson Society

Because he was too young to have figured in the American Revolution and died before the War of 1812, Lord Nelson is possibly the only notable English military commander of his period immune from disapprobation in the United States.

Membership or other inquiries can be directed to the Society in care of Tony Dickinson, Prospect House, Reedness, Goole, Yorkshire DN 14 8HG. The Society's Website is a valuable resource, at <http://www.rjt.co.uk/Nelson/html>

How to Get in Touch

Mission: History has been asked to provide an address for reader communications. E-mail may be sent to this address:

nabhst@pacbell.net

Mail may be sent by conventional post to:

Ric Teague
2239 Wellesley Street
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Submissions are not encouraged because of constraints on the time available for editing. If such are sent, they should be sent as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word 6.0 or as type-written copy, double-spaced, accompanied by a 3½-inch diskette containing the submission in Microsoft Word 6.0 for Windows.

Quite welcome, however, are suggestions of events for coverage. Please offer suggestions two months ahead of the anniversary of an event.